DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 417 828 PS 026 392

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TITLE Florida Child Care Quality Improvement Study Findings.
INSTITUTION Families and Work Inst., New York, NY.
PUB DATE 1998-03-06
NOTE 11p.; For Interim Report, see ED 388 408.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; *Day Care; Early Childhood Education; Educational Improvement; Longitudinal Studies; *State Standards; Teacher Competencies; Teacher Qualifications; Teacher Student Ratio
IDENTIFIERS Child Care Costs; Child Care Needs; *Day Care Quality; Florida

ABSTRACT

The ongoing Florida Child Care Quality Improvement Study investigates how Florida's new ratios and education requirements for early education and care affect children's development, parents' lives, and the early childhood marketplace. The project consists of three interrelated studies: The Children Study, The Parent Study, and The Market Study. The report summarizes the findings of all three studies in 1992 and 1994, and reports new findings from the 1996 Children Study. Among the findings noted are the following: (1) increased teacher education and ratio requirements significantly contributed to a number of positive outcomes in children's development in 1994 and continue to improve in 1996; (2) in comparison with other national multi-site studies of the overall quality of early education and care, Florida has made positive strides; (3) increased staff education and more rigorous ratio requirements did not have a marked negative impact on the child care marketplace nor did requirements significantly affect consumer costs during the 1992-96 period; (4) The greatest gains in children's development and in the quality of the early childhood education and care occurred when classrooms met professionally recommended ratios, which are higher than the new Florida ratios; and (5) teachers with an advanced education (associate's degree or higher) had the highest scores in terms of children's development and classroom quality; however, in 1996, teachers with a CDA or equivalency were warmer and more sensitive as well as more responsive with children than those with less than a CDA. (HTH)

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Families and Work Institute

ED 417 828

MEMORANDUM

TO: Early Childhood Public Engagement Network

FROM: Ellen Galinsky, Nina Sazer O'Donnell, Brigit Beyea and John Boose

SUBJECT: **Florida Child Care Quality Improvement Study Findings**

DATE: March 6, 1998

The Families and Work Institute is releasing findings today of the *Florida Child Care Quality Improvement Study*. This study investigates how Florida's new ratios and education requirements for early education and care affect children's development, parents' lives, and the early childhood marketplace.

We are sending you: a press release describing the study, an executive summary of the study and talking points that highlight the study's key findings. We hope you will find this information useful in your efforts to engage the public, policy makers and the media in early childhood issues.

FOR FURTHER INORMATION OR TO ORDER A COPY OF THE STUDY REPORT, CALL: (212) 465-2044, EXT. 401

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National Debate
Is Brought Into Focus

INVESTING IN CHILD CARE WITH HIGHER STANDARDS, ENFORCEMENT IMPROVES QUALITY, BENEFITS CHILD DEVELOPMENT, STUDY SHOWS

NEW YORK — The Families and Work Institute has released a study showing that investing in efforts to improve child care — increasing teacher-to-child ratios and educational qualifications of staff — can improve quality in ways that positively affect children's development.

The research "shows that regulatory improvements have a powerful capacity to affect children's outcomes and improve the quality of their early education and care," the study says. "Importantly, this study also reveals that the more stringent the improvement in staff-to-child ratios and in the educational level required of teachers, the greater the impact on children's outcomes and on the overall quality of their educational environment."

These findings are particularly pertinent at a time when congressional policymakers and experts in the child care field are debating the effectiveness of efforts to improve the quality of child care, which varies greatly around the country. The topic has been in the news a great deal since the October 1997 White House Conference on Child Care and President Clinton's proposed $21.7 billion initiative to improve quality.

The findings emerged from a statewide study of Florida day care centers, *The Florida Child Care Quality Improvement Study*, which investigated the impact of state legislation mandating more stringent day care standards. The Families and Work Institute says that while it looked only at Florida, its findings and policy implications are applicable in each of the 50 states.

In 1992, Florida reduced teacher-to-child ratios from 1:6 to 1:4 for infants and from 1:8 to 1:6 for toddlers. In addition, the state enacted a law requiring higher educational attainment for child care center teachers. The Families and Work Institute collected data in 1992, 1994 and 1996 and tracked changes in child care quality and the results of those changes over the four years.

"The study documents the importance of training for child care teachers," said Susan Muenchow, Executive Director of the Florida Children's Forum. "The study also points to the need to reduce staff turnover in order to make further improvements in the quality of care."

Among the study's findings:

- Increased teacher education and ratio requirements significantly contributed to children's cognitive and emotional development from 1992 to 1994; continued improvements were seen in 1996. Children also spent more time in learning activities in 1996 than in 1994.

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- Children's language proficiency improved and their behavioral problems, such as aggression, anxiety and hyperactivity, decreased in 1994. Overall classroom quality and the warmth and sensitivity with which teachers interacted with children increased during that period. All of these improvements held steady in 1996.

- Teachers were more responsively involved with children in 1996 than in 1994.

- Increased staff education and more rigorous ratio requirements did not have a marked negative impact on the child care marketplace. Fee increases were not statistically significant for infants and toddlers, where the new ratio requirements were the most stringent, nor did the higher standards reduce the number of infants, toddlers and older children served.

- According to a substudy of parents, the cost of child care for parents rose between 1992 and 1994, but the increases for center-based care were no larger than for home-based care. Thus, the fee increases appear to be unrelated to the regulatory change, which affected only center-based child care. Furthermore, the perceived burden of paying for child care actually declined slightly, for both center and home-based care.

- The greatest gains in children's development and in the quality of early childhood education and care occurred when classrooms met professionally recommended ratios, which are even higher than the new Florida ratios. Similarly, teachers with educational levels higher than those required in Florida — AA, BA or higher degrees in early childhood education — had the highest scores in terms of children's development and classroom quality.

"*The Florida Child Care Quality Study* shows that investment in child care — imposing improved standards and enforcing those standards — can affect children's development and that higher standards don't break the bank," said Families and Work Institute President Ellen Galinsky.

Larry Pintacuda, Chief of Child Care, Florida State Department of Children and Families, said he found the study "very helpful, both in terms of showing us the progress we have made and pointing out where we have to go to make improvements."

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Florida Child Care Quality Improvement Study

Talking Points

The Florida Child Care Quality Improvement Study, conducted by the Families and Work Institute, investigates how Florida's new ratios and education requirements for early education and care affect children's development, parents' lives, and the early childhood marketplace. It consists of three interrelated studies: The Children Study, The Parent Study, and The Market Study. This report summarizes the findings of all three studies in 1992 and 1994 and reports new findings from The 1996 Children Study.

The following talking points represent the study's key findings. A press release describing the study and an executive summary of the study are also attached to assist early childhood leaders in communicating with the media, policy makers and others about the results of this research. In 1996, FWI found that:

- **Increased teacher education and ratio requirements significantly contributed to a number of positive outcomes in children's development in 1994 that continued to improve in 1996.**

- **Increased teacher education and ratio requirements also contributed to positive gains in the quality of early education and care in 1994 that continued to improve in 1996.**

- **Other gains in children's development and in the quality of early education and care environment that occurred in 1994 were maintained in 1996.**

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- In comparison with other national multi-site studies of the overall quality of early education and care, Florida has made positive strides.

- Increased staff education and more rigorous ratio requirements did not have a marked negative impact on the child care marketplace nor did requirements significantly affect consumer costs during the 1992-1996 period.

- The greatest gains in children's development and in the quality of the early childhood education and care occurred when classrooms met professionally recommended ratios, which are higher than the new Florida ratios.

- Teachers with an advanced education (an AA, BA, or higher degree in early childhood education) had the highest scores in terms of children's development and classroom quality, which was rated between "good" and "excellent." However, in 1996 teachers with a CDA/CDA Equivalency were warmer and more sensitive, as well as more responsive with children, and had classrooms with higher quality than classrooms of teachers who had less than a CDA level education.

FOR FURTHER INORMATION OR TO ORDER A COPY OF THE STUDY REPORT, CALL: **(212) 465-2044, EXT. 401**

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Brief Summary of Findings

The Florida Child Care Quality Improvement Study, conducted by the Families and Work Institute, investigates how Florida's new ratios and education requirements for early education and care affect children's development, parents' lives, and the early childhood marketplace. It consists of three interrelated studies: The Children Study, The Parent Study, and The Market Study. This report summarizes the findings of all three studies in 1992 and 1994 and reports new findings from The 1996 Children Study.

State legislation in Florida became effective in 1992, changing teacher-to-child ratios for infants from 1:6 to 1:4 and for toddlers from 1:8 to 1:6. In addition, originally effective in 1995 but extended to July, 1996, Florida required that for every 20 children in a child care facility there be at least one staff person with a Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential, a comparable CDA Equivalency, an experience exemption, or formal education that equals or is greater than the CDA Credential or CDA Equivalency.

Research on the impact of child care on children's development reveals that a warm and caring—or what researchers term a "sensitive"—relationship between the child and his or her child care providers is of central importance. Of comparable importance is what researchers call a responsive relationship: a teacher who responds to the child emotionally with a comforting or encouraging word, socially by helping the child learn to relate positively to others, and intellectually by helping the child think, ask questions, and express him herself. Other features of child care such as the number of children each adult cares for and teaches (ratio) or the training and education of teaching staff simply make it more likely that the child will receive sensitive and responsive care. Because Florida changed the ratio and educational requirements for teachers, the state provided a natural laboratory to find out how these regulations affect children's development over time.

The Children Study sample in 1996 consists of approximately 150 licensed child care centers in four Florida counties: Pinellas, Duval, Broward, and Hillsborough. These counties were chosen by the study's Florida Advisory Board because they are representative of child care climates within the state.

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In 1996, we found that

Increased teacher education and ratio requirements significantly contributed to a number of positive outcomes in children's development in 1994 that continued to improve in 1996.

- Children's cognitive development had improved in 1994 and continued to improve in 1996 as evidenced by the fact that children engaged in more cognitively complex play with other children and with classroom materials.
- Children were also observed to be more securely attached to their teachers in 1994 and even more so in 1996, an indication of sound emotional development.
- In addition, children spent more time in learning activities in 1996 than in 1994.

Increased teacher education and ratio requirements also contributed to positive gains in the quality of early education and care in 1994 that continued to improve in 1996.

- Teachers were more responsively involved with children in 1996 than in 1994.

Other gains in children's development and in the quality of early education and care environment that occurred in 1994 were maintained in 1996.

- In 1994, we found an increased proficiency with language among children and a decrease in children's behavioral problems, including aggression, anxiety, and hyperactivity. These outcomes were maintained in 1996.
- The warmth and sensitivity with which teachers interacted with children had increased from 1992 to 1994, in 1996, teacher sensitivity remained at the same level as 1994, as did overall classroom quality.

In comparison with other national multi-site studies of the overall quality of early education and care, Florida has made positive strides.

- On a scale measuring classroom quality where a score of 1 equals inadequate, 3 equals mediocre, 5 equals good, and 7 equals excellent, Florida's scores increased from 4.17 on average in 1992 to 4.57 in 1996.
- The 1996 score for preschool classrooms was higher (4.67) than for infant/toddler classrooms (4.25).

- By comparison with Florida's 1996 score of 4.57, a 1995 study of early childhood classroom quality in four states revealed an overall quality rating of 4.0

Thus, the Florida study reveals that while the ratio and educational requirements have brought important gains, there still remains a great deal of room for improvement.

Increased staff education and more rigorous ratio requirements did not have a marked negative impact on the child care marketplace nor did requirements significantly affect consumer costs during the 1992-1996 period.

- There was understandable concern that changing the ratios for infants and toddlers might lead centers to cut back on the number of infants and toddlers served. However, four years later this does not seem to be the case. Centers did not cut back on the number of children served, including the number of infants and toddlers.

- Between 1992 and 1996, 62 percent of centers had increased their fees. These increases were modest overall and not statistically significant for infants and toddlers where the ratio requirements were most stringent. The 1996 weekly average fees for infants were $72.24; for toddlers $81.97; for preschoolers $79.21; and for school-age children $53.80.

- The Parent Study, our 1992-1994 study of a representative sample of parents with children five-years-old and under (including those who used and who didn't use child care) drawn from birth records from the same four counties also provides useful information about market impact. We found that while child care costs for parents using child care did rise over this two year period, these increases were not larger for parents using center-based arrangements than for those using home-based arrangements (family child care or relative care in the child's home or in the home of the provider). Thus, fee increases seem unrelated to the regulatory changes that occurred only in center-based arrangements. Furthermore, despite these fee increases, the perceived burden of paying for child care among parents was actually reduced slightly, for both center and home-based care.

Because such dramatic improvement occurred between 1992 and 1994, and because changes in children's development and in the quality of early education and care showed some signs of leveling off between 1994 and 1996, we conducted a series of analyses to determine the reasons. We found that

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The greatest gains in children's development and in the quality of the early childhood education and care occurred when classrooms met professionally recommended ratios, which are higher than the new Florida ratios.

- To a lesser extent, improvements occurred when centers met Florida ratios. Thus, one explanation for the leveling off of improvement is that the Florida standards may not be high enough to continue to effect dramatic change.

- A second explanation has to do with compliance. While five percent of classrooms were out of compliance with the Florida ratios in 1994, a higher percentage—14 percent—were out of compliance by 1996. Fifty-two percent of classrooms met Florida ratio requirements in 1996 and another 34 percent met a higher standard (professionally recommended ratios). The compliance rates for classrooms serving infants showed an even more diverse pattern. 19 percent were out of compliance with Florida's ratio requirements, 14 percent met Florida's standards, and 67 percent met professional ratio standards.

- Perhaps the decrease in compliance was also related to center directors' attitudes about these new laws. A majority of center directors think that the new ratios are expensive (59 percent) without improving quality (63 percent), although the evidence from this study reveals that, in fact, more stringent ratios do improve quality.

Teachers with an advanced education (an AA, BA, or higher degree in early childhood education) had the highest scores in terms of children's development and classroom quality, which was rated between "good" and "excellent." However, in 1996 teachers with a CDA/CDA Equivalency were warmer and more sensitive, as well as more responsive with children, and had classrooms with higher quality than classrooms of teachers who had less than a CDA level education.

- A plausible explanation for the fact that quality did not improve as much as it had between 1992 and 1996 is that adherence to the CDA requirement was low. The effective date to meet the requirement was extended to 1996, immediately after data were collected for this study. Thus, our study provides information about adherence to this requirement just before it became law. In 1996, only 44 percent of centers met the immediately forthcoming state requirement of one CDA (or higher) educated staff for every 20 children in any given center. On the other hand, the educational level of staff had increased. In 1992, 47 percent of center staff had high school and minimal early childhood training. By 1996, that number had dropped to 39 percent.

- As with the ratio requirement, many directors believe that the CDA makes child care expensive (62 percent), is confusing (26 percent), and is not enforced (23 percent).

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- About half of the teachers (49 percent) not pursuing the CDA requirement are planning to leave the field, though most say it is not because of the CDA requirement. Other studies have found that low salaries contribute to high staff turnover. The average 1996 salary of staff was $6.93 per hour.

- High levels of turnover also make adherence to the new law more difficult. Turnover rates were 24 percent in 1992, and 30 percent in 1994 and 1996. In fact, only two percent of the teachers observed in 1992 were in the same classrooms or even in the same centers in 1996.

The Florida Child Care Quality Improvement Study shows that regulatory improvements have a powerful capacity to affect children's outcomes and improve the quality of their early education and care. Importantly, this study also reveals that the more stringent the improvement in staff-to-child ratios and in the educational level required of teachers, the greater the impact on children's outcomes and on the overall quality of their educational environment. Without adherence to new regulations, however, the intended goal of improving children's lives can't be achieved. Thus, regulatory change should include efforts to ensure a cultural change that supports such improvements as well as practical efforts to ensure these improvements are fiscally supported and enforced.

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